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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 22nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. ABELIAN (Armenia)
(Vice-Chairman)

later: Mr. VILCHEZ ASHER (Nicaragua)
(Chairman)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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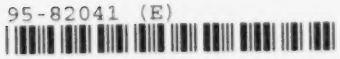

In the absence of Mr. Vilchez Asher (Nicaragua), Mr. Abelian, (Armenia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 116: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997 (continued) (A/50/6/Rev.1 (vols. I and II), A/50/7 and A/50/16)

First reading (continued)

Section 25. Public information

Section 26. Administration and management

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to continue the first reading of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997.

Section 25. Public information

2. Mr. MUÑOZ (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the European Union was disappointed with the results of the activities of the Department of Public Information, whose main goal should be to promote the United Nations to public opinion. With the exception of the public relations activities carried out on the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization, criticism of the United Nations had not been adequately countered.

3. The European Union had always shown great interest in the improvement of the management of public information activities; although it noted the reduction of about $4 million compared with the budget two years previously, it was still not satisfied that the resources devoted to public information were justified and were being used efficiently. It therefore wished to propose several ways in which improvements and significant savings could be achieved.

4. The proposed budget for section 25 did not provide clear information about the functions and responsibilities that would be entrusted to the personnel who had been involved in the activities relating to the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization. The European Union supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation on that issue.

5. Much still remained to be done to ensure that all the publications produced by the United Nations were relevant and cost-effective. The European Union wished to receive specific information regarding the impact of those publications on the targeted audiences. It therefore supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that that activity should be evaluated and believed that it would be wise to promote greater collaboration between the Department of Public Information, the Office of Conference and Support Services and the Committee on Information.

6. As pointed out by the Advisory Committee, the printing services could be used in a more efficient manner and external contracting could be limited to

cases that were strictly necessary unless it could provide the same services at a lower cost.

7. With regard to the coverage of international conferences outside Headquarters, the European Union reiterated that the utilization of new technologies could lead to improvements and increased productivity. A good example was the Fourth World Conference on Women, which should serve as a model for securing savings through the reduction of personnel travelling to such conferences, since most of the work could be carried out from Headquarters through the utilization of advanced technologies.

8. Mr. GODLEY (United States of America) said that the budget of the Department of Public Information represented approximately 5 per cent of the total United Nations budget. While the importance of public information could not be denied, the Department could be scaled back considerably without harm to the essential mandates of the Organization. The Department's ability to perform its core mandate could only be enhanced by focusing its resources in the most efficient manner.

9. His delegation believed that further rationalization of the Department's programmes was possible and supported many of the Advisory Committee's recommendations, particularly those concerning publications and the United Nations information centres. However, it questioned the proposed reassignment of posts from the fiftieth anniversary secretariat to the Department, and felt that it would be preferable to reassign those posts to areas of high priority in the budget.

10. There were three areas which could be scaled back. The first was the United Nations information centres. Until recently, the Department had disseminated information about the United Nations to the field through United Nations information centres and United Nations depository libraries. In recent years, a third method of dissemination had come about in many countries: new information technologies such as Internet, the World Wide Web or CD-ROM. The United Nations information centres, which employed some 339 staff world wide, were expensive to operate, while the other two options were inexpensive. Given that changed situation, the United Nations should examine on a country-by-country basis the need to maintain information centres when less expensive alternatives were available. Clearly, those measures were most relevant to the developed countries.

11. The United Nations depository libraries and Internet could perform most of the functions of the information centres. Since 1946, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library had set up 335 depository libraries in 137 countries containing all the documents available in the information centres, as well as fuller historical records. As part of the library agreement, each country was entitled to one free depository library, usually the national library. Other libraries could purchase documents from the United Nations.

12. The power of Internet was well known. Information about the United Nations was now available on the World Wide Web and Internet. The Department of Public Information should therefore analyse the situation in each of the countries which had an information centre or service to determine whether there was a

national library or other institution which served as a United Nations depository library, whether Internet and the World Wide Web were well developed, and whether the information centre was expensive. In some countries, costs were minimal since the host country financially supported the information centre. After looking at those factors, the costs of the information centre should be compared with the alternatives; if the depository library or electronic information duplicated the sources of the information centre, the information centre should be closed or scaled back and the savings transferred to other priority activities.

13. A second area of concern in which savings could be made was the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. Its operations had not undergone serious scrutiny since its establishment, and its departments and staffing, consisting of some 126 employees, had grown without full consideration for their impact on overall operations. Many programmes did not take full advantage of the tremendous advances in information technologies; a study of the Library should be undertaken which would lead to its reform and modernization.

14. A survey comparing the Dag Hammarskjöld Library with other libraries in the New York area showed that reform was necessary. In 1994, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library had spent 83 per cent of its budget on salaries, while the New York Public Library, the Columbia University Library and the New York University Library had spent 61 per cent, 58 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively. Although the functions, size and responsibilities of those libraries differed from those of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the difference in the use of resources pointed to the need for reform.

15. The third area was travel. The Department was requesting $1.4 million for travel for the 1996-1997 biennium; while that represented a slight reduction from the previous biennium, fewer conferences were planned over the next two years than during the current biennium. Peace-keeping expenditures were declining and the increased use of information technology should reduce the amount of travel. Given those changes, the Department's travel budget should be further reduced.

16. Mr. AMARI (Tunisia), after emphasizing the overall importance of the Department of Public Information, said that without the necessary resources the Department would be unable to fulfil its objective of enhancing the image of the Organization and countering both the internal and the external criticism levelled at it. The Advisory Committee's report indicated that the Department's budget for the biennium 1996-1997 had been cut by almost $4 million, or 3.2 per cent compared with the current biennium.

17. His delegation supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation contained in paragraph VII.6 of its report, for the conversion of 10 Local level posts into National Professional Officer posts at the United Nations information centres. It requested clarification of the amount of expenditure projected for information materials and services under subprogramme 1, Promotional services, since it shared the Advisory Committee's view that the amount was difficult to ascertain.

18. His delegation also agreed with the view expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraph VII.12, in which the Committee welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on a publications policy, with the exception of the proposal relating to the treatment of revenue from the sale of publications.

19. The Department of Public Information had 628 officers throughout the world, 166 of whom were of United States nationality. With respect to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and conference services, his delegation wished to have clarification from the Secretariat regarding equitable geographical distribution, a fundamental principle which Member States had always taken into account.

20. Mr. TOYA (Japan) said that the activities of the Department of Public Information were extremely important and commended the Department for achieving savings representing almost 3 per cent before recosting. The budget for public information was still relatively high in various areas, however. Given the current financial situation, ways of achieving further savings and reducing duplication should be sought, as was being done in other departments.

21. His delegation endorsed the view expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraph VII.6 of its report that recruitment of National Professional Officers in the United Nations information centres should be carried out in strict compliance with the revised system-wide criteria of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) for employment of such officers, as approved by the General Assembly in resolution 49/223 of 23 December 1994.

22. Mr. FATTAH (Egypt) said that, in view of the major responsibilities entrusted to the United Nations in recent years and the increased attention it was giving to social and economic matters, the Organization had a proportionately greater need to secure the support of world public opinion through the invaluable role currently played by the information media.

23. Egypt fully supported the Department of Public Information, which drew attention to the many different current issues affecting developing countries, including poverty, unemployment, drought, desertification and environmental degradation. Many developing countries and especially the least developed countries, needed to publicize the difficulties which they were confronting. Some of those countries served as information channels at the United Nations.

24. Egypt supported the proposed 3.2 per cent reduction in the budget of the Department of Public Information and encouraged the Department to continue its efforts and to rationalize its work.

25. Mr. DJACTA (Algeria) expressed his full support for the Department of Public Information, which, having proposed a reduction of its own budget, was a model to be emulated by other departments. There was no need to dwell on the important role which information played in the life of the United Nations. It was essential to enhance the image of the organization in the eyes of the world, above all in the United States where a communications problem seemed to be impeding attempts to convey accurately the true role of the United Nations.

26. The United Nations information centres throughout the world were of crucial importance to the developing countries, since they were an instrument for their development even more than for disseminating information. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library was an essential facility for diplomats, who did not have the time to use other information centres.

27. Mr. ODAGA-JALOMAYO (Uganda) said that the budget section was of great interest owing to the varied ways in which delegations received communications, ranging from telexes to the Internet. The Advisory Committee's report specified that posts assigned to activities related to the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations could be redeployed to the Department of Public Information. His delegation endorsed the Advisory Committee's recommendation that additional information should be provided on the responsibilities of such posts before approval was given. Furthermore, it agreed with the Japanese delegation that recruitment of National Professionals should be brought in line with the system-wide criteria laid down by ICSC.

28. The Advisory Committee's report indicated that the Publications Board was not fully functional because of inadequate attendance. His delegation hoped that that problem would be remedied promptly.

29. According to paragraph VII.18 of the report, extrabudgetary resources for the information centres had diminished. Such centres had played an extremely useful role in developing countries, especially in Africa, by informing the public about the United Nations and above all by highlighting the critical economic situation in Africa. However, notwithstanding their usefulness, many information centres could not receive financial support from their host countries owing to the difficult economic situation in those countries. Uganda recognized the useful work performed by the Department of Public Information in disseminating information on the United Nations, especially in relation to the critical economic situation in Africa, which had helped to attract the attention of international donors to that acute situation and had made them aware of conditions there. The Department of Public Information should be encouraged to pursue its valuable work. He therefore requested the General Assembly to grant the Department the necessary funding to carry out all its mandates, in particular those relating to developing countries.

30. During discussion of section 7B of the proposed programme budget, entitled "Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development", his delegation had pointed out that the funds proposed for the Department of Public Information seemed inadequate to allow it to carry out its mandate. He urged the General Assembly to increase the provision made for those activities in proportion to the increased activities which were to be carried out and on the basis of the priority being given to the recovery programme for Africa.

31. Mr. MONAYAIR (Kuwait) fully supported the Secretary-General's proposals for the Department of Public Information and emphasized the importance of the United Nations information centres in the developing countries and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

32. Ms. BUERGO RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that her delegation noticed a certain selectivity in the Department's programme of work, in that activities relating

to development, the environment and technical cooperation had not received the priority they deserved. She noted the reduction in the resources allocated to the Department and sought assurances that the implementation of the activities provided for in the mandate would not be affected.

33. With regard to extrabudgetary resources, she was concerned that no resources had been allocated to the Trust Fund for International Cooperation and Development, whereas $2.7 million had gone to the Development Forum Trust Fund, even though that publication no longer existed. She was also concerned by the reduction in resources for information centres.

34. Her delegation supported the work of the Library and welcomed the use of various advanced technologies. However, the provision of services to developing countries, many of which had no access to new technologies, should not thereby be jeopardized.

35. In addition, she wished to know what forms of cooperation existed between the Department and other units that carried out public information activities not provided for under section 25. She also noted with concern that the resources allocated to information activities relating to the question of Palestine had been reduced by 17.5 per cent and hoped that those activities would not thereby be affected.

36. Mr. AL-ASHABI (Yemen) shared the concern expressed by the representative of Cuba with regard to public information activities relating to Palestine and hoped that they would continue to receive support until the question of Palestine had been resolved in a just and equitable manner.

37. Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said that there were considerable opportunities for rationalizing the Department's programme of work and gave as an example the case of information centres, which were the most important means of disseminating information on the United Nations system in developing countries. The adoption of a uniform approach should be avoided, since the best way to carry out information activities was to take account of the particular circumstances of each country.

38. Mr. OWADE (Kenya) stressed the importance of public information activities for the United Nations, laying particular emphasis on the role of information centres in developing countries. The Department should receive the resources it needed to carry out its work, and technological advances should be exploited in order to improve the implementation of programmes.

39. Mr. SERMÉ (Burkina Faso) supported the proposed budget for section 25 but regretted the reduction of extrabudgetary resources allocated to information centres. He shared the concern expressed by the representative of Uganda regarding the proposal to convert Local level posts to National Officer posts. He regretted the lack of support for the training programme for the information media and considered that information centres should not be limited to dissemination activities but should be able also to work on collecting information that could be shared subsequently with the international community as a whole.

40. Mr. JU Kuilin (China) stressed the importance of the Department's work and said that it should be provided with adequate resources. He hoped that the Department would extend its activities in the areas of economic development, the environment and science and technology.

41. Mr. TAKASU (Controller) said that the Secretariat attached great importance to the efficient management of the Department and had achieved economies amounting to $4 million in various categories of expenditure.

42. With regard to travel expenses, the Secretariat proposed a reduction of $400,000 for the biennium 1994-1995. The total required amount of $1.3 million included the travel expenses of representatives and journalists attending practical courses and meetings organized by the United Nations. The travel expenses of all Department staff amounted to $500,000, which was not an excessive figure.

43. It was important to emphasize the dual function fulfilled by United Nations information centres throughout the world. They not only disseminated information material but also maintained important links with influential people, non-governmental organizations, the mass communication media and academic circles. For that reason they could not be replaced by depository libraries, although the number of such libraries was being increased.

44. The Department made no exceptions with regard to the treatment of National Officers. Such Officers, who enjoyed a high level of specialized knowledge, were in a position to undertake certain operational and informational activities most effectively. It had therefore been proposed that the functions of various information centres should be carried out by National Officers, who would continue to be governed by the standards established by the International Civil Service Commission for the United Nations common system.

45. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library was no ordinary library, since its principal function was to provide and look after documents relating to the United Nations and to provide services to Member States and to members of the public who were interested in the Organization's activities. The lifeblood of the Library was United Nations documents, which was why it was not appropriate to draw comparisons between it and other, ordinary libraries with regard to the percentage of general expenditure allocated to the purchase of books and other materials.

46. The Development Forum Trust Fund was providing the finance of the twice-monthly publication Development Business. In that connection, he noted that it had been decided to cease publication of Development Forum.

47. Most of the reduction in expenditure relating to information activities on the question of Palestine was made up for by an increase in efficiency, so that in real terms expenditure for the coming biennium was far higher than in the current biennium.

48. The Department had the task of preparing for the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. It had therefore been decided to transfer to it a small number of staff posts. It also contained some temporary staff. Once the

anniversary activities were over, one Professional post would be abolished and existing posts would be redistributed. Temporary staff would return to the posts they had held before being assigned to the Department.

49. No exceptions were made in the Department with regard to the geographical distribution of Professional staff, including staff of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. General Service staff were not subject to the geographical distribution requirement.

50. The CHAIRMAN said that, in the absence of comments by delegations he took it that the Committee had completed the first reading of section 25 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration and appropriate action.

Section 26. Administration and management

51. Mr. MUÑOZ (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that he supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the staffing of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, which provided substantive services to the Fifth Committee. Bearing in mind the increased workload of the Fifth Committee, the European Union agreed with the Advisory Committee's recommendation that substantive services provided for the Committee should be strengthened through the redeployment of resources. In that regard he pointed out that the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC), when considering the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995, had recommended that the secretariat serving both CPC and the Fifth Committee should be adequately strengthened through redeployment. The conclusions and recommendations of CPC in that regard had been endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/228.

52. The European Union supported the Secretary-General's proposal that seven new posts, currently financed from the support account, should be created in the Peace-keeping Financing Division.

53. The European Union was concerned by the possible negative consequences of the proposal to abolish two posts of language coordinator for the training programme in all the official languages of the United Nations. Since language training should receive favourable treatment in the proposed budget, it was surprising that, while the level of funds allocated to training in the official languages was being reduced, there was a significant increase in the funds allocated to other forms of training.

54. With regard to subprogramme 4, Commercial procurement and transportation services, the European Union firmly supported the efforts of the Secretary-General to reform the United Nations procurement system. It took note of the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the proposed reclassification of the post of head of the Procurement and Transportation Division to the D-2 level should be postponed until the General Assembly had examined all aspects of the reform of the procurement system. The European Union was confident that the delay would not adversely affect the reform process already under way.

55. Mr. DJACTA (Algeria) said that he shared the opinions expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraph VIII.5 of its report, particularly with regard to the increased workload of the Fifth Committee and the strengthening of the substantive servicing capacity of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management. In that regard, a draft resolution, whose sponsors included Algeria, had been distributed.

56. Mr. GODA (Japan), referring to section 26A, said that he supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the substantive servicing capacity of the Fifth Committee should be strengthened through the redeployment of resources.

57. With regard to section 26B, his delegation also supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation for the establishment of four Professional posts in the Peace-keeping Financing Division through transfer from the support account. However, the need for the three General Service posts should be given further consideration.

58. With regard to section 26C, his delegation supported the Secretary-General's new strategy for the management of human resources, which the General Assembly had endorsed in its resolution 49/222 A, and it observed with interest the restructuring of the Office of Human Resources Management, effective September 1995. Furthermore, it shared the concern of the Advisory Committee with regard to the possible adverse effects of the proposed abolition of two language coordinator posts in the training programme for all official United Nations languages.

59. Japan supported the new performance appraisal system, which would improve the management of the Organization. Adequate resources for the functioning of that system should therefore be allocated. More information was needed with regard to the funding requested for advertising and promotion (A/50/7, para. VIII.21) and for the purchase of reference and information material (para. VIII.23). With regard to alternative ways of recruitment, mentioned in paragraph VIII.14, the need for geographical distribution must be duly considered.

60. With regard to section 26D, he welcomed the inclusion of significant performance indicators in the proposed budget.

61. With respect to section 26E, initiatives for cost reduction through the introduction of advanced technology should continue to be adopted. Furthermore, as the Committee on Conferences had proposed, the Secretariat should develop a cost accounting system for conference services as soon as possible. In that regard, the use of remote translation might result in savings.

62. His delegation was not satisfied with the justification for the reclassification of five P-2 posts to the P-3 level in the translation services or the reclassification of six P-2 posts to the P-3 level in Geneva. It was understandable that the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had decided to replace its verbatim records with unedited transcripts, thereby reducing its expenses to one sixth of the current level. His delegation

welcomed that effort at cost reduction and wondered how the reduction would be reflected in the proposed budget for 1996-1997.

63. With regard to section 26G, his delegation supported the creation of a new P-4 post for a Budget Officer, which would be assigned to the Division of Administrative and Common Services of the United Nations Office at Vienna.

64. With respect to section 26H, he felt that due consideration should be given to the expenses related to security at the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

65. Mr. GOKHALE (India) noted that in section 26A, funds were requested for the reform of the internal justice system. It was not appropriate to request such funding until the reform had been approved by the General Assembly. Moreover, the Fifth Committee would have to learn the reaction of the United Nations staff with regard to the proposed reform.

66. His delegation concurred with the opinion of the Advisory Committee that the substantive servicing capacity of the Fifth Committee should be strengthened through the redeployment of resources.

67. With regard to section 26B, he found acceptable the proposed enhancement of the capacity of the budget information system of the Programme Planning and Budget Division. However, since Member States had spoken of the need to make maximum use of the available resources, the new posts should be made available through redeployment, not established from scratch. Several of the posts which had been released in the Department of Political Affairs could be used for that purpose.

68. With regard to section 26C, India supported the need for a moderate increase in the funds allocated to training in 1996-1997.

69. With respect to section 26D, he urged the Secretariat to distribute the report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the Secretariat procurement services as soon as possible so that the Fifth Committee could consider the request for additional posts. In any case, India would not be opposed to the reclassification of a D-1 post to the D-2 level if the Fifth Committee felt that it was necessary in order for the Secretary-General to implement the proposed reform.

70. With regard to section 26E, he welcomed the reduction in costs and recognized the difficult situation faced by conference services as a result of the increase in the unplanned meetings of certain bodies and the late completion of work.

71. General Assembly resolution 49/221 D, adopted by consensus, requested the Secretary-General to make available rooms for bilateral meetings and contacts among Member States. India trusted that the proposed programme budget allocated resources specifically for that purpose.

72. Mr. OWADE (Kenya), referring to section 26H, welcomed the establishment of common administrative services at Nairobi. Clarification was needed as to whether further measures should be adopted regarding the provisions for common

support services. The clarification could be provided under another programme item or, at least, during the informal consultations. The two programmes at Nairobi should retain their separate identities. Common services should include financing operations, support services and information services.

73. Savings within the programmes which resulted from economies of scale and sound administration should be reinvested in the two programmes. His delegation would like to know whether the anticipated abolition of 59 posts would take place gradually or all at once. In any event, the staff occupying the abolished posts should receive all benefits to which they were entitled.

74. Mr. KUZNETSOV (Russian Federation) said that he endorsed the recommendation by the Advisory Committee that consideration of the five posts whose establishment was proposed in connection with the reform of the internal justice system of the Secretariat should be deferred until the Secretary-General's revised proposal had been considered.

75. With regard to section 26A, his delegation agreed with other delegations that it should be strengthened through the redistribution of resources.

76. With respect to section 26B, he agreed with the proposal by the Secretary-General to establish seven posts in the Professional category and above and two in the General Service category in the Peace-keeping Financing Division.

77. With regard to subprogramme 4, Training, of section 26C, he reiterated his delegation's position that minimal resources should be allocated for that activity, since the Secretariat should hire highly competent professionals. The same applied to the resources allocated for training provided under contractual services. His delegation did not object to the fact that training expenditures exceeded $10 million, provided that the resources were used as efficiently as possible and that the activities were designed to address specific problems. His delegation shared the concern of the Advisory Committee about the possible adverse effect of the proposed abolition of two language coordinator posts from the programme of training in all official languages of the United Nations.

78. With regard to section 26D, his delegation, like others, questioned the desirability of deferring consideration of the question of reclassifying a D-1 post to D-2 in subprogramme 4, Commercial, procurement and transportation services. The matter should be considered in the light of the report by the Secretary-General on procurement reform. If the Fifth Committee decided to adopt the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, the changes should be implemented under the direction of an official at the D-2 level.

79. With regard to section 26F, his delegation joined the Advisory Committee in commending the activities undertaken by the administration of the United Nations Office at Geneva with a view to increasing the efficiency and productivity of its various units. In that connection, it supported the abolition of 1 P-5 post and 14 General Service posts recommended by the Advisory Committee and the reclassification of 1 P-3 post to the P-4 level. His delegation also hoped that technological innovations would continue to be implemented, thereby reducing the number of General Service posts.

80. Mrs. BUERGO RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that her delegation, like others, favoured strengthening the capacity of staff in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management who provided substantive services to the Fifth Committee, given the increase in their volume of work. She would like to know what initiatives were referred to by the Secretariat in paragraph 26A.3 of the proposed budget. She was also surprised that the Secretariat had presented specific measures to reform the internal justice system of the Organization, since paragraph 26A.12 indicated that the General Assembly had not yet established a specific mandate in that regard.

81. With regard to section 26B, she agreed with the delegation of India that new posts should be financed through the redistribution of resources and objected to the assumption that posts could habitually be transferred to the regular budget from the support account.

82. Section 26D gave the impression that the United Nations was gradually converting itself into a company and was abandoning its character as an international organization. Her delegation did not object to saving money, unless the process was detrimental to principles such as the international character of the United Nations, as was suggested by the increasing tendency to replace staff in established posts with experts, consultants and contract services, which obviously were not subject to the principles of geographical distribution. She requested information in writing on the number of posts which it had been anticipated would be abolished as a result of such measures. In particular, she requested information in writing on completed and anticipated transfers of Organization assets to outside contractors; she also wished to know what actual savings had resulted from such transfers and whether the appropriate bidding procedures had been followed in order to ensure that the services provided were of the highest possible quality.

83. With regard to section 26E, her delegation would like the Secretariat to confirm that the resources budgeted for the Office of Conference and Support Services would be sufficient for it to handle the increasing volume of work which it faced. In that connection, she endorsed the remarks by the Bolivian delegation, on behalf of the States of Latin America and the Caribbean, regarding the difficulties faced by conference services at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which resulted in increased costs.

84. She also wished to know when the Secretariat would issue the report justifying the proposal by the Secretary-General to abolish 19 posts in the Office of Conference Services and describing the impact of that proposal on activities of the Office, pursuant to the request by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/228.

85. Turning to section 26C, she said that her delegation had particular concerns regarding subprogramme 4, Training. In its resolution 49/222 A, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to give due priority to professional training. Her delegation doubted that the decentralization of information on the resources needed for training activities would be effective. In that regard, she requested information in writing showing the departmental breakdown of the resources allocated for training activities. She also endorsed

the observations by the Advisory Committee contained in paragraph VIII.17 of its report (A/50/7).

86. Her delegation was also concerned about the possible adverse effect of the abolition of two language coordinator posts at the P-2 level from the programme of training in all official languages of the United Nations and asked that the proposal be reconsidered. As to the standards governing language instruction at Geneva, she requested that the same standards should be applied to the staff of permanent missions in Geneva as were applied in New York.

87. She also wished to know how activity 6, Capacity-building in peace-keeping, peacemaking and humanitarian affairs, of the Training subprogramme would be financed.

88. With regard to subprogramme 5, her delegation was surprised that the Staff Activities and Housing Unit's activities included updating the Manhattan hotel directory annually.

89. Concerning the resources proposed for contractual services, which her delegation considered excessive, she requested specific information on the intended use of the services proposed for the Office of Human Resource Management in table 26C.2 of the proposed programme budget, as well as on the criteria which would govern those contracts. She also requested information on the alternative methods of contracting to be studied in the new strategy for the Organization's human resources management, in order to grasp their financial implications.

90. Generally speaking, Cuba supported the new strategy for human resources management, although she noted dissatisfaction among staff in the Professional category with regard to implementation of the Performance Appraisal System. While she supported the recommendations and observations formulated by the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 87 to 95 of its report, she would like to receive up-to-date information in writing on what stage had been reached in implementing that system. She would also like to receive information in writing, for each department, on how the early separation programme would be implemented and how many staff would be affected.

91. Mr. Vílchez Asher (Nicaragua) resumed the Chair.

92. Mrs. STODDARD (United States of America) said that the budget of the Office of Administration and Management represented approximately 35 per cent of the total United Nations budget and that the size, diversity and complexity of its functions and activities called for close scrutiny.

93. Since reform of the Secretariat's internal system of justice would be considered separately, her delegation felt that consideration of the provisions in the proposed budget corresponding to subprogramme 1, Administration of justice, of section 26A, should be deferred pending the Committee's consideration of the Secretary-General's revised proposal.

94. As for the establishment of new posts, her delegation reaffirmed its position that requests for new posts should be accommodated through

redeployment. Greater attention should also be given to the investments made in technological innovations programmes and telecommunications under subprogramme 2, Electronic support services, of section 26D.

95. Concerning section 26D, her delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee's recommendation on the need to establish a fair share of reimbursing the costs of accommodation for posts funded from extrabudgetary resources.

96. Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) requested more information on section 26A, since it did not seem to him that the budgetary increase was justified by the addition of only two posts at the General Service level charged to the regular budget.

97. Concerning the proposal to create seven permanent posts for the Peace-keeping Financing Division, in section 26B, he felt that, given the current circumstances, it would be preferable to first try to redeploy posts. Peace-keeping operations already had a financial management system which had functioned up until then, therefore there did not appear to be any justification for creating seven posts, including one D-1 and one D-2, for the financial management of those operations. It was true that demand had increased, and if the request could be justified, his delegation would be ready to examine the advantages of creating seven permanent posts.

98. His delegation shared the Cuban delegation's opinion about sections 26C and D. Concerning conference services, it fully agreed with the Advisory Committee's recommendation expressed in paragraph VIII.56, which was the most important one and which should be applied throughout the administration and management process. In those services, budget estimates should concentrate on administering available resources using three methods: better systems, procedures and administration; a comprehensive view; and the establishment of a unified conference services centre. That had been the goal pursued in recent years, representing a very bold step on the Secretary-General's part which had not been adequately reflected in the budget. If a comprehensive and unified view was being adopted and the management system was more coherent and thorough in procedures, management of publications and application of technological innovations, then the increase, small though it was, was not justified. He therefore requested the Secretariat to provide more information to justify its request for additional funds.

99. Mr. PÁLIZ (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group of countries, referred to paragraph VIII.5 of section 26 and supported the recommendation that the Fifth Committee secretariat be reinforced; concerning paragraph VIII.18 of section 26C, he reiterated his concern at the proposal to eliminate two language coordinator posts in the programme of training in all official languages of the United Nations, especially since they were Spanish-language posts. The measure would affect the growing number of members of staff of the Organization who had chosen to learn and use Spanish. He therefore requested that the proposed budget should maintain the planned allocations for the training programme; the Rio Group delegations would play an active role in the discussions to ensure that their request was granted.

100. Mr. FATTAH (Egypt) endorsed the statements by the delegations of Cuba, Algeria and Spain (on behalf of the European Union) concerning the importance of

strengthening services provided to the Fifth Committee and expressed his satisfaction with efforts undertaken to that end.

101. Concerning section 26C of the Advisory Committee's report, his delegation was concerned that two language coordinator posts were being eliminated, since that would have a negative effect on the Secretariat's training programmes, as well as on programmes under way in peace-keeping operations in some regions such as Iraq, Kuwait or Western Sahara. It contradicted the principle of the equality of languages set out in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 50/11 on multilingualism adopted a few days before, which in paragraph 7 stressed the need to ensure adequate human and financial resources for the teaching of the official languages and the working languages of the Secretariat. With that in mind, his delegation requested that the Secretariat should reinstate those posts in the proposed programme budget.

102. Mr. ELMONTASSER (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) concurred with the previous speakers on the volume of work before the Fifth Committee and on the need for resources to provide services to the Committee. Concerning section 26C, he requested the Controller to provide clarifications on the posts mentioned in paragraph VIII.10 (a) and on the 45 extrabudgetary posts. He wished to know what the functions of those posts would be and the legal basis to justify them. Concerning the posts transferred from section 29, he wished to know if that redeployment met the requirements of those posts and what their previous functions had been.

103. As to the proposal to eliminate two language coordinator posts, he shared the Advisory Committee's concern about the negative effect that that proposal would have not only on the programme of training in the Organization's official languages but also on efficiency. His delegation would not accept any measure aimed at eliminating posts and which would adversely affect training in one of the six official or working languages of the Organization.

104. Mr. AL-ASHABI (Yemen) supported the statements by previous delegations, and repeated that abolition of the two language coordinator posts would adversely affect language training at a time when it was anticipated that translation services would be enhanced, particularly for Arabic. It would also have a negative effect on the importance of languages in the United Nations.

105. Mr. HANSON (Canada) said that the budget process should be an instrument for reducing general expenses, which he defined as those expenses not directly related to programme execution. Hence, expenses under sections 1, 25 to 31, and of the executive offices under sections 2 to 24, accounting for 57.6 per cent of the regular budget, constituted general expenses. Section 26 alone accounted for approximately 41 per cent of the budget.

106. That percentage appeared very high, and was considerably higher than the percentages in the main specialized agencies - which were, in turn, higher than in the private sector. General expenses should be closely studied in order to find ways of increasing efficiency, eliminating duplication of work and using outside services.

107. His delegation had analysed, in particular, the ratio between the number of staff in the General Service category and the number in the Professional category. That ratio, in the Secretariat, stood at an average of 1.52:1; in the main specialized agencies it ranged between 1.03:1 and 1.67:1. Within section 26 of the proposed budget, the ratio varied considerably: the average level for the entire section stood at 1.55:1; for section 26A, at 1.63:1; for section 26D, at 3.55:1; and for the administrative sections in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, at 6.5:1, 8.7:1 and 5.1:1, respectively. While there was no correct or incorrect ratio, such disparities raised questions that must be answered. For purposes of comparison, in the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations, the ratio stood at 0.81:1.

108. Mr. AMARI (Tunisia) concurred with the comments made by the representatives of Algeria, India, Cuba and Egypt. He supported the Advisory Committee's request that the Fifth Committee secretariat should be strengthened, and opposed the proposal to eliminate the two language coordinator posts.

109. Mr. FAGUNDES (Brazil) endorsed the observations by the representative of Ecuador on behalf of the Rio Group and supported the request that the Fifth Committee secretariat should be strengthened.

110. Mr. ODAGA-JALOMAYO (Uganda) said he hoped that the Secretariat would respond to the issues raised by the Advisory Committee in its report, and supported the request that the Fifth Committee secretariat should be strengthened. He was concerned that an area of activity of such priority importance as the Office of the Focal Point for Women was financed from extrabudgetary sources. He considered that the provision for advertising and promotion to search for qualified candidates for recruitment should be eliminated, since Member States could identify such candidates. He repeated the position expressed previously by his delegation regarding section 26H, Administration, Nairobi.

111. Mr. DJACTA (Algeria) opposed the elimination of the two language coordinator posts.

112. Mrs. ARAGON (Philippines) supported the opinion expressed by the Group of 77, which had been taken up by the Cuban delegation, to the effect that the same standards of language teaching should be applied to diplomatic staff accredited to the United Nations in Geneva and in New York. She also shared the opinion expressed by several delegations regarding the need to strengthen the capacity to render substantive services to the Fifth Committee.

113. Mr. TAKASU (Controller) stated that, regarding section 26A, half the resources requested for the Department of Administration and Management would be devoted to conference-servicing, which was the fundamental work of the United Nations. In that regard, it should be remembered that the United Nations was created as a forum in which Member States and interested parties could meet, and therefore it was essential that appropriate conference services should be provided.

114. He noted the Advisory Committee's recommendation that substantive services to the Fifth Committee should be strengthened through redeployment of resources.

115. The Secretary-General intended to reform the Secretariat's internal justice system, for which purpose he would submit a proposal for approval by the General Assembly.

116. Regarding section 26B, it had been asked why some new posts were not filled by redeploying existing posts. That was not possible because the duties to be carried out by the holders of new posts were not comparable to those connected with existing posts.

117. An attempt had been made to achieve savings in connection with section 26C in the corresponding budget proposal. The elimination of two language coordinator posts would not impair the quality of language teaching.

118. Since training was centralized, resources were not allocated by department, except in the case of regional commissions and language teaching.

119. Details regarding alternative forms of contracting would be provided during future informal consultations.

120. The four new Professional category posts requested for the Office of Human Resources Management were intended to strengthen planning and development activities, which was in line with the general strengthening of human resources management capacity. Of the extrabudgetary posts, 45 would be financed from various sources, including Programme Support Costs, the Technical Cooperation Trust Fund and the support account.

121. Regarding section 26D, a reduction of almost $8 million had been proposed for support services, although steps had been taken to ensure that a series of minimum requirements would be met. The Advisory Committee had recommended a major reduction: in paragraph VIII.34 of its report it had recommended that the estimated requirements for rental and maintenance of the mainframe computer should be reduced by $1,390,800. That was impossible, since it would not allow minimum requirements to be met. The same applied to the reduction of $3 million proposed in paragraph VIII.47 for expenses relating to rental of two floors of the FF building.

122. Regarding section 26E, funds had been requested in connection with interpretation services for 9,600 meetings, amounting to an average of 70 meetings per week during the biennium 1996-1997. Translation, text-processing and publishing requirements had also been calculated. Should the General Assembly decide to hold more meetings, additional resources would be necessary.

123. The Secretary-General had already submitted a report (A/C.5/48/73) regarding elimination of 19 conference services posts.

124. The General Assembly had approved the establishment of unified conference services at Vienna, for which one D-1 post and one P-4 post were requested to replace one P-5 post and one P-2 post. If that request was not met, as recommended by the Advisory Committee, conference services at Vienna would be jeopardized. Consequently, one D-1 post was requested to head the Meeting, Interpretation and Verbatim Reporting Services, and one new P-4 post for those services.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.